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ABSTRACT

Defining emotional responses as the interaction of three primary emotions occurring along pleasure-displeasure, arousal-nonarousal, and dominance-submissiveness continua, a study hypothesized that (1) a systematic relationship exists between the emotions elicited by the candidate and voting behavior, and that (2) the emotions elicited by television commercials should alter the viewers' feelings about candidates on election day. Students in a political communication class contacted a sample of voters (nonuniversity personnel) and asked them to describe their emotions when thinking about one of the candidates. In addition, six samples of university students each viewed three commercials used by one of the candidates and then filled out an emotional response scale. Finally, at the polling place, 39 voters also filled out this scale for one of the candidates. Results, while inconclusive, indicated that the pattern of emotions elicited by the candidate are fairly stable and it is only their intensity that varies. Furthermore, it seems that the emotions elicited by television commercials did not significantly influence the overall feeling toward the candidate or change voting behavior.

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EMOTION ELICITING QUALITIES OF TELEVISION CAMPAIGN ADVERTISING AS A PREDICTOR OF VOTING BEHAVIOR

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EMOTION ELICITING QUALITIES OF TELEVISION CAMPAIGN ADVERTISING AS A PREDICTOR OF VOTING BEHAVIOR

The relationships among messages, attitudes and behaviors have received widespread attention by scholars in a number of academic disciplines, yet the subject remains a perplexing one, both conceptually and methodologically. At the core of the problem lies conceptual ambiguity with the attitude construct. For example, is attitude a predisposition that is linked necessarily with consistency in behavior, or can attitude be described as a more general evaluation of an object that is measurable by a questionnaire that may or may not be related to consistency in behavioral response? Gerald Miller (1980) has even questioned the very presence of attitude as an intervening variable between message and behavior in our theory and research.

Most attitude research to date has been based on a conceptualization of attitudes as "...the direction and intensity of affect felt toward an object, describable on a questionnaire," (Cushman and McPhee, 1980, p. 3), yet the measures used in such research usually yields self-reported cognitions and evaluations rather than affect or emotion. This study views attitude as a predisposition toward an object that may or may not result in consistent behavioral consequences, but that has <u>both</u> cognitive and emotional components. Recent research by Mehrabian (1980) and others suggests that emotions, not cognitions, are the primary indicators of subsequent behavior.

Therefore, this study investigates the emotional dimensions of attitudes as such dimensions may affect voting behavior.

Most political campaigns today rely heavily on mass media as a means for influencing voting behavior. Studies on the effects of political campaigns through the media have assumed that manipulation of voter cognitions will result in attitude shift with predictable behavioral consequences. However, little research has been directed toward the affective component of voter attitudes. Therefore, this study examined the effects of emotion on voter behaviors. Specifically, the investigators studied emotional effects of television advertising for two congressional candidates in the State of Florida during the 1982 campaign.

A Three Factor Theory of Emotion

The problem of conceptualizing and operationalizing "emotion" has, until recently, impeded research efforts on this important variable. However, recent theoretical and experimental research by Mehrabian (1980) and others has suggested that the full range of human emotions can be described by a parsimonious set of orthogonal dimensions; pleasure-displeasure, arousal-nonarousal, and dominance-submissiveness. Pleasure-displeasure is a continuum ranging from extreme pain or unhappiness at one end to extreme happiness or ecstacy at the other. Arousal ranges from sleep through intermediate stages of drowsiness, calmness and

alertness to frenzied excitement at the opposite extreme. Dominance-submissiveness ranges from extreme feelings of being influenced and controlled to feeling of mastery and control. These three dimensions are both necessary and sufficient to describe emotional states (Mehrabian, 1980).

Mehrabian's research support a conceptualization of emotion as mediator between situation and a person's behavioral response to that situation. Behavior, in Mehrabian's schema, is conceptualized in terms of a generic class of actions called approach-avoidance. Behaviors are seen as representing some point along a continuum from extreme desire to be associated with the situation to extreme desire to avoid association with the situation. These behaviors include physical approach versus movement away from, degree of exploration such as looking around and examining details, length of stay, like-dislike, and degree of approach toward or avoidance of persons. A growing body of research supports Mehrabian's conceptualization (Biggers and Masterson, 1983) and (Christ and Biggers, 1983).

Primacy of Emotional Response

Most studies on emotion to date have been grounded in attribution theory and have asserted that cognition is the primary human response to a set of stimuli, i.e., recognition of a stimulus precedes any emotional response to that stimulus. However, recent studies have challenged this position.

In one experiment it was demonstrated that emotion was the primary human reaction to stimuli even when cognition did not occur. Zajonc (1980) manipulated photographic presentations in such a manner that the period of time they were visible to the perceiver could be controlled and varied. Length of exposure could be reduced to miniscule fractions of a second. Subjects could reliably report emotions elicited by various stimuli even when the period of presentation was so brief that cognition (recognition) regarding the stimulus was not possible. Zajonc concluded that the primary response to any stimulus is emotional and that cognition is secondary. The results are explained in terms of the reliability of multiply redundant nonreliable circuits. Emotional or affective response may be the primary response to political candidates' advertising as well.

Relation of Emotions to Approach-Avoidance

Generally, persons approach stimuli that elicit feelings of pleasure and avoid those that induce pain. Research indicates that arousal operates as a drive to the basic pleasure response; as arousal increases, the behavioral response (approach or avoidance) appropriate to that level of pleasure-pain increases. In a high pleasure situation, greater arousal will cause greater approach while in a low pleasure situation, increased arousal will lead to more avoidance. These relationships have been demonstrated in terms of work, food consump-

tion, affiliation, alcohol consumption, attitude change and so on (Mehrabian, 1980; Biggers and Pryor, 1982).

Dominance-submissiveness operates as permission to behave. When a person feels dominant (s)he feels as if (s)he has freedom to act. Strong approach behavior associated with high pleasure and arousal is potentiated when high feelings of dominance are reported as well (Biggers and Rankis, 1982).

Measurement of these relationships has been effected by a series of paper and pencil instruments developed to measure pleasure, arousal, and dominance. Each of these instruments has produced high reliability scores (alpha above .80) in previous research (Russell and Mehrabian, 1974).

Rationale for the Present Study

Research reviewed above indicates that the primary human response to any stimulus may be emotional. Emotional responses can be viewed as the interactions of three primary emotions, conceptualized as occurring along three orthogonal continua labelled pleasure-displeasure, arousal-nonarousal, and dominance-submissiveness. These emotional responses are systematically related to behavior characterized as along an approach-avoidance continuum (where a high preference = approach, low preference = avoidance), then a systematic relationship should exist between the emotions elicited by political advertising and viewer preference for the candidates.

Specifically, we would suggest that the emotions that are elicited by the candidate will be systematically related to the voting behavior of the people. The candidate with the highest pleasure rating should receive the greatest number of votes. If the candidate's pleasure level is positive, then the greater the arousal that is felt, the more votes that will be forthcoming. If the candidate produces feelings of dominance--it will work to his benefit if he also produces feelings of pleasure and arousal. If the candidate produces feeling of displeasure and arousal--higher levels of dominance will produce fewer votes. Research Question One asks if emotions are systematically related to voting behavior.

If television advertisements are an important determiner of the feelings that voters have about the candidate--then we would expect the emotions that are elicited by the commercials would change the way people feel about the candidate. Specifically, we would suggest that the emotions felt about the candidate on election day will be a function of the emotions that are felt before the campaign and the emotions that are elicited by the television commercials. If the commercial, for example, elicits more pleasure than the candidate does at the beginning of the campaign, then the level of pleasure felt on election day will the higher than was the initial level. Research Question Two asks if the emotions that are elicited by commercials alter emotional levels.

Method

Subjects for this study consisted of eight separate samples. Sample one consisted of adults, non-university personnel that were contacted by students enrolled in a political communication class. These subjects were asked a series of demographic questions, how they felt about one or the other of the candidates and their preference in the election. A total of 67 persons were contacted. Thirty-nine were asked to think about Glen Rinker, twenty-eight were asked for their feelings about Dante Fascell. The average age of this sample as 29.2 years. Thirty-seven of the respondents were male and thirty were female. Fifty-three were employed and fourteen were not. When asked to describe themselves in terms of ethnic background, thirty-eight indicated some variant of white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, twelve indicated that they were Hispanic, ten called themselves Jewish, and two indicated they were black. This distribution is fairly indicative of the make-up of the congressional district that these candidates wished to represent. Sixty-three people indicated that they had a TV, sixty-two reported having a radio, and forty-nine indicated that they received the newspaper on a daily basis.

Samples two through seven were composed of university undergraduates from three different universities located in areas distant from Miami. Each of these samples viewed three of the commercials that were used in the local campaign and

and then filled out the emotion scales. Each group saw only the commercials from one candidate. Students were enrolled in communication classes at Trinity University in San Antonio.

Sample seven consisted of thirty-nine individuals that were asked to be part of the study as they exited the polling place. This exit interview population was asked to fill in the emotion scales for one of the candidates and then to express a preference. This sample had a mean age of 39.6 years, consisted of 17 males and 22 females, 25 were employed while 14 were not, 23 of them indicated that they were some variant of white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant; 7 indicated they were Hispanic, seven indicated that they were Jewish, and one was black. Thirty-six indicated that they had a TV while 38 indicated that they had a radio. Only twenty-seven reported receiving a newspaper on a daily basis.

Procedure

Subjects in sample one were asked to describe the emotions that they felt when thinking about one of the two candidates. This data collection was completed one month before the election day and before any commercials had appeared on TV. Subjects in samples two through seven viewed videotapes of the commercials of one of the candidates and then filled out the emotion scales. This data collection occurred several weeks after the election. None of the subjects in these samples had any previous knowledge of the candidates.

Subjects in sample eight were contacted as they exited the polling place and asked to rate the emotions elicited by one of the candidates and their preference in the race.

Scores for all of the various collections were entered into the computer. Step one of the data analysis was to run frequencies to insure that all of the data were clean. Step two of the data analysis was to check the reliability of the emotion scales by calculating alpha. Each of the scales produced an alpha that was deemed acceptable (pleasure = .83,arousal = .70, dominance = .77).

To investigate the relationship between the emotion eliciting qualities and voter preference a series of stepwise regressions were conducted. The first stepwise regression dealt with the emotions elicited by Dante Fascell prior to the election campaign. Emotion scores for pleasure, arousal and dominance, and all of their interactive terms were regressed on preference. The result of this analysis was a significant equation ($\underline{F}_{(6,27)}$=258). Residuals were calculated and plotted to assure that the data conformed to the assumptions of the regression model. To determine the best variables to include in the equation, a procedure suggested by Alpert '77 was employed. In this approach, one observes the behavior of the R^2 adj statistic. When the R^2 adj reaches a maximum all of the reliable variables have entered into the equation. In this manner the regression was concluded at step four. The equation included terms for dominance, dominance x arousal,

arousal, and pleasure x arousal x dominance. For specifics see Table 1.

TABLE 1

variable	R square	BETA
dominance	.200	2.59
dominance x arousal	.250	-4.44
arousal	.311	2.66
pleasure x arousal x dominance	.360	1.86

A second regression was conducted in which the emotion scores for Glen Rinker were regressed on the preference scores for him. This analysis produced a significant but very different equation ($F_{1,28}$=20.84). Only one term was important--pleasure x dominance accounting for 40 percent of the variance.

TABLE 2

variable	R square	BETA
pleasure x dominance	.426	-6.53

A third regression was calculated using the election day data. In this analysis the preference scores that the voters reported were entered with the emotion scores and the same procedure was followed as before. Again a significant equation was produced ($F_{5,33;}$=7.346). The variables that were

allowed to enter the equation and their various Betas are reported in Table 3.

TABLE 3

variable	R square	BETA
pleasure x dominance	.4521	12.07
pleasure x arousal	.4680	12.29
arousal	.4788	-6.76
pleasure	.5037	-7.39
pleasure x arousal x dominance	.5267	-16.81

To explore the notion that the emotions that are elicited by the candidates influence the emotions elicited by the commercials, a series of analysis of variance and t=tests were conducted. First we determined if the emotions elicited by the commercials were the same as the emotions felt about the candidates at the beginning of the campaign. To do this mean, pleasure, arousal and dominance scores were calculated for the candidates and for their commercials. For Rinker the results indicated that his commercials elicited less pleasure than was reported at the beginning of the campaign ($F_{(1.85)}$=18.847) The amount of arousal was greater in the commercials ($F_{(1,85)}$=4.327). Dominance was not significantly different.

For Fascell pleasure and arousal were not different in the commercials for the initial levels but dominance was higher ($F_{1,74}$=6.327). Means are presented in Table 4.

TABLE 4

Candidate	mean emotion pre	mean emotion TV
Rinker	pleasure = 6.43	5.19
	arousal = 5.18	5.74
	dominance = 5.90	6.33
Fascell	pleasure = 6.23	5.88
	arousal = 5.22	5.70
	dominance = 5.97	6.63

The final analysis in this part of the study involved the emotion scores reported for Fascell at the beginning of the campaign, in his TV commercials and on election day. We reasoned that if emotions in the commercials were different from those at the beginning then the final emotions would have moved toward the TV emotions. The degree of this shift would indicate the importance of the TV commercials in determining the final emotions elicited by the candidate. Examination of the means indicated that the emotions had changed in the expected directions in all instances but these were only trends; none of the differences were significant. See Table 5 for means.

TABLE 5

Mean Emotion for Fascell Before, on TV and on Election Day

	Pre campaign	TV	Election Day
pleasure	6.23	5.88	6.16
arousal	5.22	5.70	5.41
dominance	5.97	6.63	6.15

Discussion

The results are provocative but not conclusive. It was our initial purpose to determine the importance of the emotions elicited by the candidate. In the Fascell sample the emotions explained 36% of the variance in the preference group. In the Rinker sample, over 42% of preference was accounted for by the emotions elicited by the candidate. In the election day sample, the amount of variance accounted for by emotion had increased dramatically to 52%. Interestingly enough, the pattern of emotions that were important had not changed. This may indicate that the emotions that are elicited by a candidate are fairly stable and it is only their intensity that varies.

The second part of the study is not as successful. In this section, we wanted to determine the importance of the emotions elicited by TV commercials. Our idea was to determine if the emotions elicited by the ads influenced the overall feeling toward the candidate and subsequently the voting behavior. The results seem to indicate that there is an influence but not a major one. In the case of both candidates, the emotions

elicited by the ads seem to be important in determining the final emotions.

Several problems present themselves here. First, the emotions elicited by the ads are not very different than the emotions felt initially. This would leave little room for change in emotions. Second, the candidates have been known for quite a while therefore it is possible to suggest that the feelings elicited by the ads are only a small part of the overall picture.

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